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SUBJECT: ONTARIO BY-ELECTIONS: LIBERALS WIN BIG AS EXPECTED

Ref: Toronto 70

11. Prominent Liberals recorded convincing victories as expected in two Ontario federal by-elections on March 17. Bob Rae, former NDP Ontario Premier (1990-95) and current Liberal foreign affairs critic, won overwhelmingly in Toronto Centre, a long-time Liberal stronghold. With a voter turnout of only 28%, Rae took 59% of the vote, or in raw vote terms, 14,187 votes out of 24,000 cast. More notable than Rae's unsurprising victory was the relatively strong performance by the Greens, who finished third with 14%, barely 65 votes behind the NDP, the traditional alternative choice in this left-leaning riding. The Conservatives, who by most accounts did not run a serious campaign and were beset by early controversy in their candidate selection process, took just 12.5% of the vote.

12. In the northern Toronto riding of Willowdale, former Liberal leadership candidate Martha Hall Findlay also won big, easily outpacing Conservative challenger Maureen Harquail 59% to 30%. Turnout-typical for a by-election-was very low at 25%.

13. COMMENT: The Toronto Liberal by-election victories were no surprise, and the wide margin of victory and lack of a serious Conservative challenge only affirm the Liberal edge in Ontario urban areas. Ontario's federal Liberals are sending two prominent personalities and former leadership rivals of Stephane Dion to Ottawa. Bob Rae in particular is viewed as a potential Dion alternative for the Liberal leadership.

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